

## Global Business Languages

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Volume 2 *Cultures and Cross-Cultural Awareness in  
the Professions*

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Article 5

May 2010

# The German Job Application: A Mirror of Culture

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### Recommended Citation

Bailey, Jutta (2010) "The German Job Application: A Mirror of Culture," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 2 , Article 5.  
Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol2/iss1/5>

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### THE GERMAN JOB APPLICATION: A MIRROR OF CULTURE

Preparing a résumé and letter of application is an excellent writing exercise for a foreign language class. For second- or third-year German classes, a number of textbooks offer sample résumés and application letters with instructions to students for writing their own (Aufderstraße et al., Bolten, Clay). Gudrun Häusler et al. devote their book *Stellensuche, Bewerbung, Kündigung* completely to the process of finding a job and preparing the application. The pedagogical reasons for studying and/or writing a résumé and the accompanying letter of application are clear: the real-life writing exercise; the discussion of culture; possibly the actual job search for students looking for positions or internships in a German-speaking country. For the latter, a number of handbooks not designed as language textbooks are on the market and easily obtained (Bailey; Coelius, *Bewerben nach dem Studium*; Hesse and Schrader; Staufenberg).

In the process of discussing and writing the application documents, a number of cultural issues must be addressed, such as the inclusion of personal data or a photo on the résumé. The type of information included and the format of the document present a rich source of culture and reveal much about German thought. A comparison with a typical US résumé also illustrates why an “American experience” is difficult to fit into the German format. In the United States a résumé and cover letter are often the only documents submitted by a job applicant and must contain all pertinent information. In Germany the résumé usually is part of a larger application packet. While a résumé and letter suffice for an initial non-solicited application, a complete packet, consisting of a plastic folder with a cover sheet, résumé, copies of diplomas, and proof of past employment, comprise the *übliche Unterlagen*, the set of documents expected in response to an advertised position.

The purpose of this article is to provide an in-depth examination of the cultural content of the German job application, primarily the résumé,

*Global Business Languages* (1997)

or *Lebenslauf*. The following discussion will begin with the letter of application and then continue parallel to the outline of a *Lebenslauf* that is standard for entry to mid-level positions: personal data; education and work; skills and hobbies.<sup>1</sup> A schematic outline and a fictional example of a typical German résumé are appended to this paper.

#### THE LETTER OF APPLICATION

The letter of application uses the standard format of a German business letter; numerous works offer examples and guidelines (Bailey, Gunter, Schmitz and Scheiner). While the résumé can show both a current and a permanent address, the letter must show only the address to which return mail can be sent, including telephone, fax, and e-mail information. The company address should include the name of a particular person, an *Ansprechpartner*. If none is known, a telephone call to the company can usually establish a connection to an appropriate person involved in the recruiting process.

The so-called *Betreff* and/or *Bezug*, the “subject” of the letter, needs to appear between the company address and the salutation. A single line, in bold print or underlined, suffices: *Bewerbung um ein Praktikum*, possibly with a reference to any prior correspondence or conversation: *Telefongespräch mit Frau Bittner vom 20. Februar*. The text of the letter is quite comparable to that of a typical American application letter; however, Germans tend to err on the side of brevity. The preferred length of one page must be achieved without resorting to tiny print or narrow margins; in fact, a considerable amount of blank space should be left on the page, a rule that applies also to the résumé.

The content of the letter poses no special requirements with the exception of the last paragraph. A brief statement of interest and qualifications precedes specific information that explains why the applicant should be considered for the position. Information contained in the résumé is not repeated in the letter; a brief description of special projects and achievements is appropriate, however. In the United States, such accomplishments are usually included on the résumé, resulting in short paragraphs replete with so-called action words, such as “completed,” “achieved,” and “increased.” The German résumé is devoid of these phrases.

<sup>1</sup>With increasing age and work experience of an applicant, the résumé tends to deviate from this standard format; however, these individual variations are beyond the scope of this article.

Germans understand as well as Americans that the application documents must present the applicant's qualifications in the best light possible; however, the writing style is more subdued. The applicant should avoid exaggeration and excessive self praise (*Kein Eigenlob!*). A letter that describes the writer as "creative" or "dynamic" may cause the reader to wonder why such prominent labels were necessary. A less direct statement is more effective, explaining for example that the applicant has worked successfully in project teams. Overall, a slightly formal approach is appropriate. Some subjunctive and passive verb forms are the norm, but the letter should not appear stilted. Present tense instead of future and present perfect instead of simple past tense are correct and help attain immediacy.

The closing paragraph of the letter contains specific information pertaining to availability and the request for an interview. The need for an explicit statement of availability is a reflection on German employment procedures. Germans give notice to their current employer in accordance with dates specified in advance. Often, notice must be given four or more weeks in advance and coincide with the end of a month or even the end of the quarter. Even if no such restrictions apply to the applicant, the reader of the letter expects the information regarding availability. Many employers send a form letter within two weeks acknowledging the receipt of application materials, but then a waiting period of four weeks or more follows. There is no sense of urgency, and applicants should avoid any sense of urgency on their part. Words such as "immediately" are out of place because hiring decisions have long-term effects, and Germans tend to take a little extra time before finalizing a decision.

For the same reason, regular mail is the best way of submitting an application. Telefax and express mail create a sense of urgency that makes the recipient wonder if the applicant hastily put the material together at the last minute or whether s/he has an exaggerated sense of self importance. Applicants writing from abroad must allow for additional time because some firms will reply by surface mail, adding a delay of approximately six weeks. While many companies indicate a fax number on their letterhead, possibly an e-mail address, they rarely use these channels of communication for contacting applicants. On the other hand, an interested employer will call the applicant on the telephone, even long distance.

## THE RÉSUMÉ

### *Personal Data*

Personal data, consisting of name, address, date and place of birth, marital status, and nationality are placed in a prominent position at the top of the *Lebenslauf*, followed by information about education, work, and special skills and interests. Also, the American reader immediately notices the presence of a photo, which is affixed to the top right corner of the document. Information regarding parents, children, health, and religion is no longer on the German résumé.

The photo provides a first impression of whether the applicant is serious and professional: a family snapshot or a pose in evening dress is clearly inappropriate. A professional passport-size photo, showing head and shoulders, is the norm. It also allows for a more subjective assessment by the reader, such as whether this person appears *sympathisch* [friendly, nice] or appropriately groomed. The photo also is expected on applications for internships and blue-collar jobs.

The personal data and the photo required on the résumé clearly represent a crude mechanism to facilitate the initial selection process from the pool of applicants. Students in the United States tend to raise the issue of equal opportunity and age or gender discrimination when confronted with the German résumé requirements. Germany has very stringent laws regarding employment, dismissal, and working conditions.<sup>2</sup> Article 3 of the German constitution (*Grundgesetz*) prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, language, ethnic origin, and religion. However, few applicants raise any questions about the need for, or the purpose of, the personal information on the application. Even Claus Coelius, who critically examines the application documents in his attempt to strip the job search of its mystique, simply repeats that age and marital status need to be included (*Das neue Bewerbungskonzept* 69).

When asked about the need for information such as the date of birth or marital status, staff of human resources or employment agencies state their need to know for purposes of taxation and insurance. While this is certainly true, one must ask why the potential employer needs to know this information before actually hiring an individual. The simplest explanation is partially true: tradition. Naturally, the potential employer wants to know as much as possible about the applicant in order to gauge poten-

<sup>2</sup>The *Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*, the *Kündigungsschutzgesetz*, and agreements between labor and management associations regulate terms of employment and dismissal.

tial illnesses or time commitments to family. Factors such as health, religion, and children have largely disappeared from the hiring process, but tradition is a powerful influence, and members of a cultural group are rarely aware of the reasons for certain behavior.<sup>3</sup>

The inclusion of marital status, for instance, has lost some of its usefulness. Formerly, children were also listed on the résumé, so that the employer knew to expect potential difficulties due to family crises and to keep family obligations in mind when deciding on a salary or work-related responsibilities. Today, children are no longer listed, but due to a shift in attitudes toward marriage, the marital status alone is not indicative of anything except the legal tax bracket. In a united Germany of 83 million inhabitants, nearly 1.6 million couples live together without being married legally (GLOBUS, "Ehe-nein danke"),<sup>4</sup> and of married couples only 45% have children living at home (GLOBUS, "14 Millionen Familien mit Kindern"). More than 10% of German children live with a single parent (GLOBUS, "Vater - Mutter - Kind?"). Thus, marital status is no longer indicative of dependents or familial obligations.

The applicant's age or date of birth, which must appear on any German résumé, can be used as a discriminatory factor in the hiring process. Job advertisements may actually include a statement about the desired age of applicants, such as an ad placed in a reputable national newspaper for a manager, "zw. 35 und 45 Jahre alt" [between 35 and 45 years of age], and a secretary "zw. 25 und 35 Jahre" [between 25 and 35] ("Stellenangebote" 23). Blatant age discrimination is not legal in Germany; for example, an older employee cannot simply be replaced by a younger person with the same qualifications.<sup>5</sup> However, there is a strong association between age and experience, or qualifications, deeply based in the culture and traditions of the country. Professional speakers, for example, will state their name and age by way of introduction, because the age places a person in a certain developmental phase. A twenty-five-year-old secretary is old enough to have at least a few years of experi-

<sup>3</sup>In numerous informal interviews with German friends and staff of employment agencies (*Arbeitsamt*) and human resources departments, questions about the purpose of the date of birth and the marital status on the résumé have elicited only bafflement: "That's the way it is."

<sup>4</sup>GLOBUS publications rely primarily on statistical information gathered by public and private organizations, including the *Statistisches Bundesamt*, and provide current data on demographic and socio-economic trends in Germany and Europe.

<sup>5</sup>German labor law often provides specific protection for older employees, who may require more sick leave or less strenuous work. In case of dismissal, the employee may appeal through the workers' council, the *Betriebsrat*. See *Politik für Arbeitnehmer*, Wöhe, and Schwedes.

ence. A thirty-five-year-old manager, likewise, has five or more years of experience, since the usual age for graduation with a master's level degree is 28 or 29. (See the section on "Education and Experience" below for a more thorough discussion.)<sup>6</sup>

The names and occupations of one's parents, the component most remembered by Americans as being "different," are no longer on the résumé. It was customary to include the parents' names and professions or job titles rather prominently on the German résumé. Older handbooks, as recently as ten years ago, explain this practice by referring to a potential employer wanting to form a comprehensive impression of an applicant, including background and upbringing (Friedrich). Like age and photo, the parents' data can, of course, become a detriment or an advantage. Viewed in a positive light, the reader of the résumé may infer that the applicant from a working-class milieu is an intelligent and hard worker, who got ahead despite possible hardships. A more negative interpretation could raise questions about the applicant's manners, the way s/he speaks, and the company s/he keeps. The opposite effect is just as typical. An applicant who can put down a father in a high-level position may hope to gain an additional advantage. Reflective of German culture is the fact that it is usually the father, not the mother, whose occupation counts. Most statistical studies of social status and educational placement of children ordinarily track only the father's career (Rodax, Zacharias), even though today about 70% of German women are employed or seeking employment (GLOBUS, "Zwei Welten"). A 15- or 16-year old who is leaving school in order to pursue an apprenticeship may still put down the parents' names and positions in order to fill an otherwise empty page. However, most recent publications on writing résumés clearly state that parents are not to be mentioned, especially as the applicant gets older (Coelius, *Bewerben nach dem Studium*; Hesse and Schrader; Plüskow; Staufenberg).

Also, a statement about religion is no longer required on the résumé. An applicant's membership in a church still is relevant upon entering employment because employers are responsible for deducting a special church tax (*Kirchensteuer*) from the income of any employee who is a member of the Protestant and Catholic churches organized in nationally

<sup>6</sup>There is no equivalent of an associate or bachelor degree in Germany. The lowest level degree is at the master's level and is denoted by different names: *Diplom*, *Staatsexamen*, *Magister*. A diploma from a *Fachhochschule*, a more practically oriented institution of higher education, is perhaps somewhat comparable to a bachelor degree.

recognized umbrella organizations. Of course, each individual has a choice about belonging to a church; some people actually leave the church in order to avoid paying the church tax. Since church membership is usually not relevant to the hiring process, it has been deleted from the résumé, but it is included in personal data records maintained by personnel offices in order to make the required tax deductions.

Foreign applicants are well advised to abide by the German rules and to include a photo as well as all the other personal information. Omission, perhaps in an attempt to disguise age or gender, will raise suspicions. The reader of the documents might wonder if the applicant was careless and “forgot” the information or, worse, if the applicant was trying to hide something. In such instances, many Germans tend to suspect the worst. On the other hand, American applicants should not try to become more German than the Germans themselves and include personal information that is not called for. Applicants in the United States often include voluntarily on their résumés the names and ages of children and a reference to the applicant’s health. These two items, however, are usually not included on the German résumé.

#### *Education and Work*

*Completeness, Chronology, and Continuity.* Aside from obvious requirements, that is, the presentation of data in a truthful and readable fashion, the German résumé has two important stipulations: completeness and chronology.

Education and experience are broken up into separate categories; then items appear chronologically within each group—not in reverse chronology as in the United States. For Germans this usually means overall chronology, because many finish all their schooling before finding work, with the exception of odd jobs. The interrelatedness of chronology with a person’s development, that is, of age with experience level, is indeed the outstanding cultural issue in regard to the German résumé and will be discussed at length. Another important concept is completeness. There should be no gaps in the personal history for two reasons. First of all, unexplained gaps easily give rise to suspicions about what happened during those periods (jail? illness?) and lead to the expectation of future difficulties (Coelius, *Das neue Bewerbungskonzept* 38). Secondly gaps point to a lack of continuity, a concept that will be discussed together with the need for focus and coherence, a concept Germans call “*Roter Faden*” (an extended connection that is visible like a piece of “red



thread"). Naturally, many applicants show a few months of unemployment, and a recent study shows that a period of up to two months does not have to be explained (Coelius, *Das neue Bewerbungskonzept* 72–73).

*School.* Younger people start by listing all schools attended on the résumé, at least high school, but perhaps also elementary school, especially if they have no work experience yet. (See the sample résumé in the appendix for actual entries.) University graduates and applicants with work experience typically list only the high school and the type of diploma, indicating the high school type—or track—attended.<sup>7</sup> Roughly after age 40, the high school diploma is no longer very important, especially for high level positions.

The type of high school is an initial distinguishing feature. While German society claims to be egalitarian today (the so-called *nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft*), remnants of social stratification can affect one's career. The school system with its three tracks of high school is not openly linked to wealth or status, but indirectly it is. Children from a working-class background are still more likely to attend the *Haupt- or Realschule* (5th through 9th and 10th grade respectively), while children of academics are more likely to attend the *Gymnasium* (5th through 13th grade). In 1994, 81% of university students came from families where the father was self-employed, a civil servant, or in a white collar position. Only 14% came from working-class families (father) (GLOBUS, "Soziale Herkunft"), a relatively stable number, since in 1982 it was 13% (Rodax 228). On the other hand, students attending the *Hauptschule*, which ends with completion of the 9th grade, still come largely from working-class families (Schröder 27). Several empirical studies since the 1960s have confirmed that the placement of children into one of the three types of high schools is more dependent on the social background of the family than the intellectual ability of the child (Schröder 15). Overall, more and more children do attend the *Gymnasium* or the *Gesamtschule*,<sup>8</sup> both of which administer the *Abitur*, the diploma required for admission to university. In 1960, 9% of students completed the *Abitur*; in 1991 the number had risen to 27% (GLOBUS, "Abi für alle").

*University/Apprenticeship.* University or an apprenticeship is listed directly below high school data with years of attendance and diplomas. At this point, the chronology postulated for the German résumé becomes

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the German school system see Zacharias and Führ.

<sup>8</sup> The *Gesamtschule* combines all three tracks of high school, so that children can decide at a later time how many years of schooling to complete.

intertwined with cultural expectations: first education; then work. Most Germans finish all their education before they apply for full-time work, resulting in a linear chronology that parallels the logical division into “education” and “work experience.” American students who find employment after college and later enroll in a graduate program must choose between a chronological presentation or a logical division; most Germans fulfill both criteria. In case of a job search in Germany, applicants whose phases of development do not meet the German criteria may need to provide explanations in the letter of application.

A typical course of studies at a university lasts five to seven years. Employers increasingly pay attention to the number of years an applicant needed to complete a degree, since they want motivated and young employees. While higher education is valued and more students than ever attend university, it is still relatively unimportant where one went to school.<sup>9</sup> The name of the university is supplied on the résumé, but there is not much benefit to emphasizing it. Rankings and guides to German institutions of higher education (*Universitätsführer*) are now available (Jurtschitsch and Gottlieb, “Novizen aus der Provinz”); however, Germany has no so-called elite schools such as Harvard and Yale in the United States or l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (H.E.C.) in France.<sup>10</sup>

All students who do not complete the 13th grade and then pass the *Abitur*, are encouraged to apply for an apprenticeship, a two- or three-year course combining schooling and on-the-job training, which is listed on the résumé with dates of completion and type of diploma. The federal states’ chambers of industry and trade (*Handwerkskammer* or *Industrie- und Handelskammer*) bear the responsibility of supervising tests and certification for *anerkannte Ausbildungsberufe*, the officially recognized professions (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit 430). Many students who have earned their *Abitur* delay entry to university by first completing an apprenticeship in order to gain a competitive edge by acquiring practical job skills. Some institutions also offer dual track programs, a combination of university education and apprenticeship, primarily in the fields of business and engineering (Pittscheidt and Schwartz).

<sup>9</sup>Germans tend not to relate much to their educational institutions once they have graduated. In contrast to American graduates, very few Germans will nostalgically tell stories of their university years. High school and university are places to get an education, whereas in the United States, the “college experience” is also important.

<sup>10</sup>In studies of higher education in German-speaking countries, the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland is often mentioned as an elite institution.

*Work Experience.* Work experience is listed on the résumé, like in the United States, with the name of the company and the city. However, where Americans usually supply a job title and then brief descriptions replete with action words and dollar amounts to illustrate their successes, Germans tend to be more concise and often simply state the department or area they worked in, for example, sales or customer relations.<sup>11</sup> They may explain some specific project, such as participation in the development of a product, or special achievements; however, lengthy details are relegated to a different document, the *Werdegang*. This is a prose description of one's achievements and the major stages of professional development, used in addition to the *Lebenslauf* by applicants with much work experience.

This factual approach is culturally interesting, because Germans are at times characterized as being preoccupied with titles. It is true that academic titles, such as professor and doctor, should be observed in conversation and correspondence. Designations denoting managerial level, such as project manager or department head, often are more appropriate on the *Werdegang*; whereas one's professional specialty, such as baker or engineer, appears on the résumé. There is no steadfast rule, however; each applicant must weigh the advantages of including certain data in light of the position desired.

Compulsory military service is briefly stated in one line on the résumé. Germany still has a draft with a basic requirement of twelve months' service. In 1993, about 130,000 young men chose to complete fifteen months of civil service instead, which often entails hard work in caring for the sick or elderly (GLOBUS, "Einsatz für kranke und Behinderte"). Unless the applicant made the military his career, nothing else is said about it. Germans do not usually exhibit a special sense of pride for having served in the military.

Using common sense, the applicant should put down all relevant work experience, rather than necessarily cataloguing all jobs. One or two full-time positions obviate the need to include a summer job at a hamburger restaurant during high school. A recent graduate of high school or college should, however, list such jobs because they show that the applicant possesses at least some experience in keeping "real-world" commitments and working with colleagues. Increasingly, employers are also seeking

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<sup>11</sup>Personal introductions in general are somewhat low-key, consisting usually of first and last name, age, and area of work, without details about achievements.

candidates who are self-motivated and flexible. Odd jobs can help to illustrate such qualities, for example, if a linguistics student has spent summers working in a factory or on the family farm. Finally, the fact that an applicant has held a job in addition to completing a degree demonstrates a quality that appears in many advertisements as *Belastungsfähigkeit* or *Leistungsbereitschaft*, the ability to cope with stress and a willingness to work hard. Since many American students do work, they should point this out, perhaps in a summary statement, explaining that they worked every summer in order to finance their studies.

*Cultural Implications.* Traditionally, education and work experience (called *Werdegang*) in Germany follow a linear progression: elementary school and high school, followed by higher education or an apprenticeship, and eventually work experience. The word *Werdegang* means roughly “process of becoming” and reflects the idea that a person’s development is continuous and based on causal and chronological relationships.<sup>12</sup> It is still the norm to finish education first and then seek work, which is why many university graduates are 28-30 years old when they apply for their first full-time position (“Ballast über Bord werfen,” Fritz-Vannahme).

It is very unusual for an older person to start university, even for a mother whose children have grown up. Learning, in the sense of studying and training, is still very much considered the province of the young. For older people the saying “*Schuster, bleib bei deinem Leisten*” applies: “Stick to your trade.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it is becoming more common for students to work, complete internships, and participate in special projects related to their field of study, such as the *Oscar GmbH*, a successful consulting agency staffed by business students from the University Köln (Horstkoetter). For more experienced employees, seminars and workshops on work-related skills and such modern developments as time-management are available.

While the education process for university students is changing, traditional values placed on focus and continuity are still relevant to many

<sup>12</sup>Occasionally, a résumé will follow this chronological outline *ad absurdum*. For example, in the German textbook *Themen neu 2*, the sample résumé provided lists the applicant’s marriage and divorce in the middle of her work experience, where these events fell chronologically. This does not conform to current practice, especially not for university graduates.

<sup>13</sup>The government offered many retraining programs for residents of the new states after German unification in 1989, but privately citizens of the old states could be heard wondering why someone over thirty would want to start an apprenticeship in a completely different career.

trades, the *Handwerksberufe*. An apprentice who has jumped from field to field without proper training or has broken off an apprenticeship is suspected of aimlessness and lack of persistence, even insufficient reliability. The literature uses the term *Abbrecher* [quitter], and an unfinished apprenticeship looks bad on the résumé. The government (*Statistisches Bundesamt*) tracks the number of young people who do not finish their apprenticeships. In 1982, 14% of apprenticeships were not completed; in 1992 the number was up to 28% (GLOBUS, “Die meisten ‘Abbrecher’ in der Seeschifffahrt”), an increase clearly signaling a change in traditional educational patterns due to economic and social causes.

German society has traditionally fostered stability and security with such programs as co-determination and well-defined employment contracts. However, as the German economy finds itself squeezed by worldwide competition, the “German model” of co-determination, social welfare, and high incomes is increasingly coming under attack (Sauga et al.). Businesses more often seek flexible employees, who can adapt to new challenges and are willing to look for innovative solutions. This includes non-traditional educational preparation for a job market where practical skills and quick thinking prove more important than conventional schooling (Pittscheidt et al., Reischauer). Despite such changes on the horizon, the linear, chronological outline for the résumé persists. A coherent, continuous development, the so-called *Roter Faden* [red thread] mentioned earlier, ideally can be traced so that the applicant’s résumé reflects a life that has been goal-oriented and making steady progress. In the American culture, trying out many different activities is much more acceptable; the word “challenge” is surely an integral part of the job search. Also the idea of a self-made person, someone being successful without book learning or schooling, is part of the American dream. In Germany, that has been traditionally unacceptable, and the term *Herausforderungen* [challenges] has entered the job seeker’s vocabulary only in the last few years, quite possibly imported from the United States by exchange students. The most important reason for German managers today to seek new positions frequently is the desire for new challenges (60%), followed by desire for more freedom and responsibility—not money or advancement (Bierach).

#### *Skills and Interests*

The third and final major section of the *Lebenslauf* contains information on special skills, continuing education, hobbies, and activities. These

components are very similar to those of an American résumé; however, again the German selection is more restrictive. While young Americans tend to include many activities, clubs, honors, and interests spanning high school, college, and adulthood, Germans include one to three recent activities and current interests. In the area of hobbies, it is not quantity but quality that counts, just as with work experience. To an American it may seem important to display many different interests and involvement. A German might wonder if a person with more than two or three hobbies and activities pursues these in depth. This appears to reflect a fundamental difference between the German and American approaches to life. Germans are typically very methodical and thorough, Americans more uncomplicated, sampling many activities.

The German selection of interests is specific: not reading, but “modern drama” as a specific genre; not music, but a specific instrument. The selection leads the reader to think that this person is building knowledge or skill, although there is no proof that Germans are in fact more serious about their hobbies. In the area of sports, it is important that the hobby is really an activity one engages in regularly, perhaps in the context of a club. A slightly unusual hobby is favored rather than the more common, such as swimming or jogging. Playing a musical instrument and speaking a foreign language are good items for the résumé since they illustrate dedication and persistence needed to acquire a difficult skill.

In this final section of the résumé, primarily language and computer skills appear alongside any unusual but useful information, such as a pilot’s license. Recent high school graduates can put a variety of present and former extracurricular activities; more experienced applicants or university graduates would probably not exceed two or three current hobbies or projects. Participation in competitive high school sports is worth mentioning, even years later; brief associations with drama clubs or stamp collecting, on the other hand, are simply not considered important unless they played a role in the applicant’s development (perhaps learning to speak extemporaneously) or are still pursued as a serious hobby. A relatively new addition to activities on the German résumé is a reference to volunteer work (*soziales Engagement*). Many Americans routinely get involved in charitable organizations and should specify such involvement on their résumé. For Germans this is still uncommon and shows a willingness to go the extra mile.

While Americans can thus include their volunteer activities, the category “scholarships and awards” is largely unknown in Germany. Stipends are usually awarded on the basis of financial need, and awards for schoolwork or behavior are simply not common. The American applicant has to weigh carefully the option to mention honor societies and special awards. The concept of academic honor societies is difficult to explain in German because grades determine the track of high school a student attends. Good grades, therefore, do not lead to awards and honors but to a different educational path (see the discussion of schools and university above). More useful than the proper name of an organization or sponsor is a descriptive statement, such as “Stipend awarded for academic achievements.” The expressions *cum laude* and *summa cum laude* are clear to Germans without further explanation. Among organizations well known in Germany are the Rotary Club and AIESEC, and any involvement with these can safely be added to the résumé.

## CONCLUSION

An American preparing a German résumé and letter of application must not simply translate documents into the German language. The information must be adapted to the proper German format and corresponding cultural expectations. The typed *Lebenslauf* looks much like a typed data sheet or résumé used in the United States. However, important differences remain. The typical US résumé tends to be covered with print, at times in too small a font, because applicants include descriptive paragraphs of projects, activities, clubs, and the like. The German résumé tends to be more concise; a considerable amount of blank space is preferred to enhance readability. Job titles and projects are alluded to in key words but not sentences. Furthermore, the German résumé is more selective: not every project or achievement needs to be stated because other documents included in the application packet provide more information on the applicant’s background.

The letter of application does not duplicate data presented by the *Lebenslauf*. Achievements and special projects, which appear on the résumé in the United States but not in Germany, are described in the letter. Together, the two documents comprise factual data as well as a statement of personal interests and accomplishments. Furthermore, job advertisements in Germany usually request the *üblichen Unterlagen*, an application packet or personal portfolio. In addition to a letter and résumé, copies of

diplomas and certificates are requested for assessment. The portfolio also contains brief job descriptions of previously held positions or letters from former employers. All the data that Americans must fit into their résumé is thus distributed over several documents.

Changes in the educational system and the job market are now breaking up the linear progression typical of German education. The numbers of apprenticeships started and finished have been declining. More students are attending university, but a growing number does not obtain the degree. Many others acquire work experience while they are enrolled because employers increasingly place more value on practical experience of job candidates. Broadening cooperation within the European Union is responsible for the creation of more student exchange programs and the availability of jobs outside Germany. The education process is thus slowly being harmonized within Europe, resulting also in a more homogenous hiring and application process.

It remains to be seen how these changes will affect the format of the German application documents. It is conceivable that the body of the résumé will be broken up into logical segments, such as education and work experience, without insistence on a chronological sequence. Personal data will most likely continue to be required since many other European countries have similar traditions. The items provided as "other information" toward the end of the résumé will surely diversify as Germans study and work abroad and take more advantage of continuing education, seminars, and volunteer work. Applicants increasingly must write thoughtful and creative letters in order to stand out from the masses. In some fields, such as computer science and marketing, multimedia-based applications are gradually becoming popular. In the meantime, anyone writing a job application to be used in Germany is well advised to be conscious of the traditions as well as the ongoing process of change.

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## APPENDIX

*The German résumé—a schematic example*

YOUR NAME	
Temporary Address:	(photo)
Permanent Address:	
Personal Data:	
Date of Birth: Place of Birth: Nationality: Marital Status:	
<hr/>	
Education:	Date    High School name and city Diploma  Date    University name and city Major(s) Specialization Degree  Date    Study abroad Institution and city Topics  Date    Degree
Work Experience:	Date    Company name and location -Department and/or area of responsibility  Date    Company name and location -Department -Projects
Languages:	(list languages and skill level)
Computers:	(list skills and/or software)
Extracurricular Activities:	(list 1–3 activities)

<b>MARTINA BUSCH</b>	
Derzeitige Adresse: Königstraße 43 13345 Berlin Tel./Fax 030/4 67 12 12 E-Mail: martinab@universi.de	(photo)
Heimatadresse: Lorbeerweg 17a 34567 Kassel	
Persönliche Daten: Geburtsdatum: 23. Juli 1970 Geburtsort: Kassel Staatsangehörigkeit: deutsch Familienstand: ledig	
<hr/>	
Ausbildung:	9/82–6/89 Horst Klaus Gymnasium, Kassel Hochschulreife  10/89–6/95 Freie Universität Berlin Betriebswirtschaftslehre Schwerpunkt: Rechnungswesen Abschluß: Diplomkaufmann
Arbeitserfahrung:	6/91–9/94 Modischer Schick, Berlin Verkäuferin in der Damen- modenabteilung Teilzeitbeschäftigung zur Finan- zierung des Studiums  seit 10/95 Große Bank, Berlin Kundenberatung
Sprachkenntnisse:	Deutsch (Muttersprache), Englisch (sehr gut), Französisch (Grundkenntnisse)
EDV-Kenntnisse:	Textverarbeitung, Tabellenkalkulation, Daten- banken
Außercurriculare Aktivitäten: Skilaufen, Kanusport, freiwillige Arbeit beim Roten Kreuz	